DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 426 775 PS 027 240

AUTHOR	Taveras, Gabriela
TITLE	Home Visits: From the Teacher's Perspective.
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	12p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Caregiver Child Relationship; Day Care; Day Care Centers; Early Childhood Education; *Family Environment; *Family School Relationship; *Home Visits; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Behavior; Teacher Participation; *Teacher Response
IDENTIFIERS	New York (New York); Project Head Start

ABSTRACT

This study focused on the topic of home visits from the teacher's perspective. A survey was distributed among 40 teachers who were randomly selected from New York City schools. These teachers were from Head Start, day care settings, and public and private schools. The survey focused on whether teachers find home visits to be an effective tool in bridging the gap between home and school. The survey also focused on whether home visits are taken seriously by the respondents. Findings indicated that teachers thought that home visits were an effective tool in bridging the home-school gap. Despite this general finding, the majority of teachers had never conducted a home visit, usually due to concerns over safety, the fact that such visits are not a requirement of most programs other than Head Start and some child care programs, concern about parental reaction to having a teacher visit the home, and the feeling that home visits were not taken seriously. The study also found that many teachers had never had professional training in how to conduct a home visit and expressed concern over finding time to fit home visits into already full schedules. (Author/SD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Home Visits: From the Teacher's Perspective

by Gabriela Taveras

ED 426 775

This article focuses on the topic of home visits from the teachers' perspective. A survey was distributed among forty teachers who were randomly selected from NYC schools. The survey focused on whether teachers find home visits to be an effective tool in creating an opportunity for bridging the gap between home and school. It also focused on whether home visits are taken seriously by the respondents.

It wasn't until I started working for Headstart eight years ago, that I become aware that Headstart teachers were required to conduct home visits under the Headstart Performance Standards. As a new teacher, I was puzzled, confused, and did not quite understand what was expected of me in conducting a home visit. Many questions came to mind and so my curiosity became stronger as I began asking my co-workers about it. Later, as I became more experienced, knowledgeable, and comfortable with the whole idea of home visits, I decided to do some research on teachers' perspectives on home visits. The question of home visits is especially interesting to me because, I found that it is a topic of controversy among educators. Focusing on how teachers look at home visits, I decided I would include Headstart, Daycare, and Public school teachers in my survey. My survey will be limited to NYC teachers only. Moreover, I will look at the different perspectives of teachers and summarize my findings based on the data collected. Teachers will be randomly selected from NYC schools.

As I explore existing literature on the topic of home visits, it came very clear that authors agree that home visiting is a very effective tool in creating a "golden opportunity to get parents involved early in school activities and to open up the lines of communications between school and

PS 027210

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Gabriela Taveras
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

home." (Hawthorne, May 1984, p.49). Home visits serve the purpose of building a connection of trust between parent and teacher, explained Johnston and Mermin. (July, 1994, p.64)

Clark, goes further in discussing how "...If a staff is open-minded and literally willing to go the extra mile, a home visit program can turn a school around". (1994, p.49) She found that attendance at school functions went from a total of three parents in the entire school to as many as three or four in every classroom.

At a school of New Mexico, two teachers created a program where they encourage parent-child interaction through Home Kit Activities. "Our home visits program was the rapport that develop between the parents, teachers, and the children. Parents started coming into the school more often to talk with teachers... We were bridging the gap between home and school." (Gorter-Reu & Anderson, May,1998, p.73)

These two teachers went further in explaining how home visits had changed their lives. "We came away from our children's home with respect and admiration for families doing the best they could, sometimes under dire circumstances. We began to view all children in our classes more compassionately and with greater understanding. Now we know that each child has a unique and special life. Our goal is to nourish the skills children do have and appreciate parents and encourage them to be an integrated part of their child's education" (May, 1998 p.73)

Another teacher states, "These whole business of making a home visit is a statement of how much you care and respect this child...You take that first step, you meet children on their territory... It is scary to walk into some many homes you have absolutely no idea about. But it does make a statement; and if the child doesn't pick up on that caring, the parents do, and it is conveyed back to the child. Home visits are the best way I can think of to make an initial contact with a child and to say to that child, "You are important." (Johnston & Mermin 1994, p.63)

Nonetheless, knowing how effective home visits can be, comments "School districts generally are limited in their support of home visits. Few programs provide release time for the visitor" (Hawthorne, May,1984,p.49) Nielsen agrees that ..."Principals and teachers today appear less likely to make home visits, missing the chances for useful information and strong school-home link." (Summer1991, p.207) Johnston and Mernin support this notion by agreeing that many Early Childhood programs do not include home visits, and so they ask themselves "Why is that?" (p.63)

This becomes a very important question , as I support these arguments. I find myself in agreement with the authors Gorter-Reu and Anderson in their statement, " Although many books and articles focus on the value of home visits, they are not done or even considered in the public schools in our area." (May 1998, p.73) I find that home visits are not taken seriously enough as they should be in order to run a well balanced

early childhood education program.

Johnston and Mernin also state and I agree, that most preschools do not stress home visits as a way to understand families better. Although they are not meant for gathering facts about the home environment home visits do allow teacher to learn some important facts about the children's home lives. Keeping this in mind, I plan to give specific examples of some of the teachers experiences during visiting the child's home.

For many teachers, home visits become a negative pressure:

-How can I make home visits to so many children, when I have a classroom of 30 children? or

-Why do I need to make home visits?

-How do I get the time to fit in home visits when I have classroom responsibilities from 8 in the morning to 5 in the afternoon?

-Some parents at my center seem threatened by a home visit and don't want teachers in their home. What can we do?

Johnston and Mernin give some answers to these questions in their article along with some Practical Tips on Doing Home Visits. In addition, I also included some tips from my personal experiences in conducting many home visits .

Some Helpful Tips

> Let parents know you'll be there for 20-30 minutes. Leave plenty of time between visits to find the next house and enough time at

each visit so you won't have to end abruptly.

> Get clear directions / confirm the time and date

> Dress comfortable, simple but not flashy

> Consider alternative ways to meet with the family if families refuse or feel uncomfortable about a home visit

>Schedule visits during In-service Training/ early in the morning or late afternoon.

> Always go with another person, never alone.

> Be respectful of culture and expectations.

> Be a good listener

> Establish a relaxed tone/ expect the unexpected and don't appear alarm

> Focus on the positive of the situation

I too asked myself these very same questions when I first enter Headstart, but now I have a different perspective after finding out how effective home visits can be. I decided to go the extra mile and make a difference for myself, for my students, and for my parents.

Teachers Speak up on their home visiting experiences:

"I have to admit, I get very scared upon entering the projects (buildings), the tenants appear apprehensive when they see unfamiliar faces entering their building. The elevators have an unpleasant smell and can be very scary. I worry about how the parents will react when they

see me with another person, usually a social worker from my job, arriving at their homes."

"I don't mind making home visits because I get better understanding of where my students come from and about how the student interacts in his/her own environment."

" I once made a visit that really broke my heart. It was a family of five living in a small one bedroom apartment. The apartment was crowded and the three siblings shared a room, while the mother and father sleeps in the living room. The children had little toys to play with and no room to move around freely. But what I found most amazing about the whole visiting experience, was the warmth and love this family had for one another."

" I feel like I'm invading someone elses' privacy. I feel uncomfortable and I wish home visits was not a requirement of my program. I feel it takes too much time going from one home to another and home visits can be very stressful."

"My home visiting experiences have been very pleasant, the parents welcome me into their homes and felt appreciative that I have taken the time to spend with their child and care about their concerns. The students get very exited and happy to see me . They usually bring out their toys and books for me to see. I feel I gain a lot from a home visit. And I wish other teachers would too."

Survey

My survey targets an audience of NYC teachers from Headstart, Daycare, Public, and Private schools. The purpose of my survey is to get teachers' perspectives on the topic of home visits. The survey consist of 12 questions pertaining to whether home visits are an effective tool of creating an opportunity of briging the gap between home and school and a way of building a connection of trust between parents, teachers, and students. and if so, whether home visits are taken seriously by the respondents, and does the program support home visits. In total, forty questionnaires were distributed randomly among teachers only. The findings, will be summarized based on the data collected.

Survey Findings

Teachers' perspectives on the topic of home visits are very interesting. From the 40 teachers who participated in the survey, 43% teach at Public schools, 30% at Headstart, 12% Daycare and, 16% other.

52% teachers said that home visits were not a requirement of their program, while 45% of teachers said that they are a requirement, and 2% answer no, but they can be done. The teachers who answered yes, work either at a Headstart or Daycare programs .

When teachers were asked to define what Home visits means to them, 45% agree that home visits are a way to see a child's environment, and to see how the child interacts in his/her own environment. Another

*25%, said that home visits were a way of speaking, or meeting with the parents of the child. 18% believed that home visits meant that a teacher will discuss a child's problems, and how a child is performing at school, 12% answered, not applicable.

An outstanding number of teachers said they had never received training or any inservice job training for conducting home visits. 78% of teachers never had training , and 70% have never actually conducted a home visit. Of the 30% who have conducted a home visit, were teachers either from Headstart or Daycare programs.

The next two questions on the survey, gave a very clear picture of teachers' personal feelings and some of their main concerns about conducting home visits. For example, 22% of teachers' personal feelings about conducting a home visit is to get a better understanding of the child in his/her environment. * Another 20% believes that it is a good way of building a relationship and communication between parents and teachers, * 10% said that home visits can be helpful in providing teachers with new information they did not know otherwise, and *8% said that it shows teachers care. *Interesting enough, 20% felt that conducting home visits is an invasion of families, and it's dangerous and parents feel threatened. While 20% answered , Not applicable.

The main concerns among 35% of teachers was safety and where to find the time to conduct Home visits. Another 28% of teachers would be concern about the interactions that goes on between parent and child in

their own environment. While 25% said they would be concern about parents reactions, where they might feel a sense of intrusion on their private lives. And yet another 8% would be concern on how to approach and speak with parents. 5% responded not applicable.

In regards to how are teachers supported in conducting Home visits, 62% answered not applicable, 20% said that they get no support from Social Service, Directors or the system. Only 18% felt that yes, they get some support from their Directors, Social Service, or Principals.

Conclusions

Teachers find home visits to be an effective tool of creating an opportunity of bridging the gap between home and school, and yet, the majority of teachers have never conducted a home visit. The findings show that home visits are not taken seriously, and that home visits are not a requirement of most programs other than Headstart, and Daycare programs. The findings support Nielson's argument that... " Principals and teachers today appear less likely to make home visits, missing the chances for useful information and strong school-home link." (Summer,1991,p.207)

In addition, not one teacher even mentioned how home visits can help build trust between parents, teachers and students. This supports Gorter-Reu and Anderson's statement that, "Although many books and articles focus on the value of home visits, they are not done or even considered in the public schools." (May,1998,p.73) It was clear that, like

Johnston and Mernin had stated, most preschools do not stress home visits as a way to understand families better. Many teachers were concerned for their own safety and concern about how parents would react having a teacher visit their home. It is really disappointing to find that home visits are not taken seriously enough when we as educators know how effective they can be, in making a positive move towards better understanding of our children, and our parents. It is this kind of issue that more and more educators need to look into more closely.

As an early childhood educator, I highly recommend all teachers to take a closer look at their program and consider home visits as an important component of any early childhood program.

References

Clark, S. , (1994) . Home visits: A new twist on an old-fashion idea. Principal V 73 , 49-50 .

Gorter-Reu, M. S. , & Anderson, G.M. (1998) . Home visits and more . Young Children, V53 , 71-73 .

Hawthorne, F. (1994) . A forgotten resource: Home visits. Principal V73, 49 .

Johnston, L. , & Mermin, J. (1994) . Easing children's entry to school: Home visits help. Young Children, V49n5, 62-68.

Nielson, S. (1991). Enhancing home-school links through home visits. Educational Horizons, 206-210.